FirstNet will aide in Iowa emergencies

The Iowa Department of Public Safety, the Iowa Statewide Interoperable Communications System Board (ISICSB), and Connect Iowa marked a significant milestone in the implementation of FirstNet.

This first phase of the Long Term Evolution Network (LTE) known as FirstNet is a significant step in the creation of a statewide broadband network exclusive for use by first responders, law enforcement and the medical community.

Iowa is one of the first states in the nation to complete the initial data collection phase for FirstNet. Led by ISICSB, the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) serves as a technical management support partner to ISICSB, by gathering required asset and profile data. ICN collected initial datasets to create a master data set of state and commercial vertical assets, including, but not limited to the telecommunication infrastructure available in Iowa. Also assembled was information for public safety users and coverage profiles. The profiles determined what Iowa's public safety sector is currently utilizing.

The data analysis included identifying user base and mobile devices/usage for each county. Roxann Ryan, Iowa's Public Safety Commissioner says, "This is going to be the largest public safety initiative in our state's history." She added that the completion of phase one in its implementation before any other state shows, "Iowa is poised to be the nationwide leader of the FirstNet network."

Thomas Lampe, Chairman of the Iowa Statewide Interoperability Communications System Board (ISICSB), says the impact of FirstNet to Iowans is imperative to the safety of Iowans. Lampe points to recent Tornados in Iowa as an example of when FirstNet would be essential. First responders at the scene were not able to easily access a commercial network because of high traffic. FirstNet, would have enabled law enforcement to communicate and share information with ease.

According to Lampe, "What happens in that particular incident, is everyone is responding to the scene. Everyone wants to know if their loved one is OK. Everyone is using the network for that. That takes a lot of bandwidth and if everyone happens to be on the one cell site and we're coming in as first responders to that site we can't make a call. We can't get through.

"With the FirstNet network in that particular instance, we would have what we need to stream for example video of damage to someone who needs to see it."